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THE FINGER OF GOD IS THERE¹

REVEREND P. PERNIN

CHAPTER I BEFORE THE CATASTROPHE

A GLANCE AT THE COUNTRY

A country covered with dense forests, in the midst of which are to be met with here and there, along newly opened roads, clearings of more or less extent, sometimes a half league in width to afford space for an infant town, or perhaps three or four acres intended for a farm. With the exception of these isolated spots where the trees have been cut down and burned, all is a wild but majestic forest. Trees, trees everywhere, nothing else but trees as far as you can travel from the bay, either towards the north or west. These immense forests are bounded on the east by Green Bay of Lake Michigan, and by the lake itself.

The face of the country is in general undulating, diversified by valleys overgrown with cedars and spruce trees, sandy

¹The terrible forest fire which has recently devastated northeastern Minnesota lends peculiar timeliness to this thrilling account of the fiery hurricane which swept over the counties of northeastern Wisconsin in October, 1871. Coming so close to the Chicago fire of October 9, 1871, the Wisconsin fire failed to attract the degree of attention of the outside world which the magnitude of the disaster merited. Over a thousand persons were burned to death, almost as many more were painfully wounded, and three thousand were rendered destitute. But the mere statement of these figures conveys little or no impression of the real character of the fiery ordeal to which the people of northeastern Wisconsin were subjected. For this we can only look to the narratives of those who went through it. Too often such witnesses lack the inclination or the ability to record their story in enduring form. Fortunately for us the Peshtigo fire produced a capable historian in the person of Father Pernin, the village priest, the first half of whose narrative is presented in this issue of the Magazine. The little book from which it is taken was published at Montreal in 1874, with the approbation of the Bishop of Montreal, and sold for the benefit of "the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, in Marinette, State of Wisconsin," which Father Pernin was then building. Although many copies of the book must have been printed and distributed, not until three years ago did the State Historical Library learn of its publication, and the copy then secured is the only one of whose present existence we have knowledge. It is a small paper-covered volume of 102 pages, and contains, in addition to the narrative proper, the first installment of which is before the reader, an introduction and an appendix dealing largely with matters of Catholic faith which we omit to reprint.

hills covered with evergreens, and large tracts of rich land filled with the different varieties of hard wood, oak, maple, beech, ash, elm, and birch. The climate of this region is generally uniform and favorable to the crops that are now tried there with remarkable success. Rains are frequent, and they generally fall at a favorable time.

NATURAL CAUSES OF THE CONFLAGRATION

The year 1871 was, however, distinguished by its unusual dryness. Farmers had profited of the latter circumstance to enlarge their clearings, cutting down and burning the wood that stood in their way. Hundreds of laborers employed in the construction of a railroad had acted in like manner, availing themselves of both axe and fire to advance their work. Hunters and Indians scour these forests continually, especially in the autumn season, at which time they ascend the streams for trout-fishing, or disperse through the woods deer-stalking. At night they kindle a large fire wherever they may chance to halt, prepare their suppers, then wrapping themselves in their blankets, sleep peacefully, extended on the earth, knowing that the fire will keep at a distance any wild animals that may happen to range through the vicinity during the night. The ensuing morning they depart without taking the precaution of extinguishing the smouldering embers of the fire that has protected and warmed them. Farmers and others act in a similar manner. In this way the woods, particularly in the fall, are gleaming everywhere with fires lighted by man, and which, fed on every side by dry leaves and branches, spread more or less. If fanned by a brisk gale of wind they are liable to assume most formidable proportions.

Twice or thrice before October 8, the effects of the wind, favored by the general dryness, had filled the inhabitants of the environs with consternation. A few details on this point may interest the reader, and serve at the same time to illustrate more fully the great catastrophe which overwhelmed us

later. The destructive element seemed whilst multiplying its warnings to be at the same time essaying its own strength. On September 22 I was summoned, in the exercise of my ministry, to the Sugar Bush, a place in the neighborhood of Peshigo, where a number of farms lie adjacent to each other. Whilst waiting at one of these, isolated from the rest, I took a gun, and, accompanied by a lad of twelve years of age, who offered to guide me through the wood, started in pursuit of some of the pheasants which abounded in the environs. At the expiration of a few hours, seeing that the sun was sinking in the horizon, I bade the child reconduct me to the farmhouse. He endeavored to do so but without success. We went on and on, now turning to the right, now to the left, but without coming in view of our destination. In less than a half hour's wanderings we perceived that we were completely lost in the woods. Night was setting in, and nature was silently preparing for the season of rest. The only sounds audible were the crackling of a tiny tongue of fire that ran along the ground, in and out, among the trunks of the trees, leaving them unscathed but devouring the dry leaves that came in its way, and the swaying of the upper branches of the trees announcing that the wind was rising. We shouted loudly, but without evoking any reply. I then fired off my gun several times as tokens of distress. Finally a distant halloo reached our ears, then another, then several coming from different directions. Rendered anxious by our prolonged absence, the parents of my companion and the farm servants had finally suspected the truth and set out to seek us. Directed to our quarter by our shouts and the firing, they were soon on the right road when a new obstacle presented itself. Fanned by the wind, the tiny flames previously mentioned had united and spread over a considerable surface. We thus found ourselves in the center of a circle of fire extending or narrowing, more or less, around us. We could not reach the men who had come to our assistance, nor could we go to them without

incurring the risk of seriously scorching our feet or of being suffocated by the smoke. They were obliged to fray a passage for us by beating the fire with branches of trees at one particular point, thus momentarily staying its progress whilst we rapidly made our escape.

The danger proved more imminent in places exposed to the wind, and I learned the following day, on my return to Peshtigo, that the town had been in great peril at the very time that I had lost myself in the woods. The wind had risen, and, fanning the flames, had driven them in the direction of the houses. Hogsheads of water were placed at intervals all round the town, ready for any emergency.

I will now mention another incident that happened a few days before the great catastrophe:

I was driving homeward after having visited my second parish situated on the banks of the River Menominee, about two leagues distant. Whilst quietly following the public road opened through the forest, I remarked little fires gleaming here and there along the route, sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other. Suddenly I arrived at a spot where the flames were burning on both sides at once with more violence than elsewhere. The smoke, driven to the front, filled the road and obscured it to such a degree that I could neither see the extent of the fire nor judge of the amount of danger. I inferred, however, that the latter was not very great as the wind was not against me. I entered then, though at first hesitatingly, into the dense cloud of smoke left darkling behind by the flames burning fiercely forward. My horse hung back, but I finally succeeded in urging him on, and in five or six minutes we emerged safely from this labyrinth of fire and smoke. Here we found ourselves confronted by a dozen vehicles arrested in their course by the conflagration.

"Can we pass?" inquired one.

"Yes, since I have just done so, but loosen your reins and urge on your horse or you may be suffocated."

Some of the number dashed forward, others had not the hardihood to follow, and consequently returned to Peshtigo.

It may thus be seen that warnings were not wanting. I give now another trait, more striking than either of those just related, copied from a journal published at Green Bay. It is a description of a combat sustained against the terrible element of fire at Peshtigo, Sunday, September 24, just two weeks before the destruction of the village:

Sunday, the 24th inst., was an exciting, I might say a fearful time, in Peshtigo. For several days the fires had been raging in the timber all around—north, south, east, and west. Saturday the flames burned through to the river a little above the town; and on Saturday night, much danger was apprehended from the sparks and cinders that blew across the river, into the upper part of the town, near the factory. A force was stationed along the river, and although fire caught in the sawdust and dry slabs it was promptly extinguished. It was a grand sight, the fire that night. It burned to the tops of the tallest trees, enveloped them in a mantle of flames, or, winding itself about them like a huge serpent, crept to their summits, out upon the branches, and wound its huge folds about them. Hissing and glaring it lapped out its myriad fiery tongues while its fierce breath swept off the green leaves and roared through the forest like a tempest. Ever and anon some tall old pine, whose huge trunk had become a column of fire, fell with a thundering crash, filling the air with an ascending cloud of sparks and cinders, whilst above this sheet of flames a dense black cloud of resinous smoke, in its strong contrast to the light beneath, seemed to threaten death and destruction to all below.

Thousands of birds, driven from their roosts, flew about as if uncertain which way to go, and made the night still more hideous by their startled cries. Frequently they would fly hither and thither, calling loudly for their mates, then, hovering for a moment in the air, suddenly dart downward and disappear in the fiery furnace beneath. Thus the night wore away while all earnestly hoped, and many hearts fervently prayed, for rain.

Sunday morning the fires had died down, so that we began to hope the danger was over. About eleven o'clock, while the different congregations were assembled in their respective churches, the steam whistle of the factory blew a wild blast of alarm. In a moment the temples were emptied of their worshippers, the latter rushing wildly out to see what

had happened. Fire had caught in the sawdust near the factory again, but before we reached the spot it was extinguished. The wind had suddenly risen and was blowing a gale from the northwest. The fires in the timber were burning more fiercely than ever, and were approaching the river directly opposite the factory. The air was literally filled with the burning coals and cinders, which fell, setting fire all around, and the utmost diligence was necessary to prevent these flames from spreading. The engine was brought out, and hundreds of pails from the factory were manned; in short, everything that was possible was done to prevent the fire from entering the town.

But now a new danger arose. The fires to the west of the town were approaching rapidly, and it seemed that nothing short of a miracle could save it from utter destruction. A cloud of hot, blinding smoke blew in our faces and made it extremely difficult to see or do anything; still prompt and energetic means were taken to check the approaching flames.

The Company's teams were set to carrying water, and the whole force of over three hundred of the laborers in the factory and mills were on the ground, besides other citizens. Goods were packed up, and moved from buildings supposed to be in immediate danger. Indeed a general conflagration seemed inevitable. I have seen fires sweep over the prairies with the speed of a locomotive, and the prairie fire is grand and terrific; but beside a timber fire it sinks into insignificance. In proportion as the timber is denser, heavier, and loftier than the prairie grass, the timber fire is intenser, hotter, grander, than the prairie fire. The fire on the prairie before a high wind will rush on and lap up the light dead grass, and it is gone in a breath. In the timber it may move almost as rapidly, but the fire does not go out with the advance waves which sweep over the tops of the trees and catch the light limbs and foliage. Nor is there the same chance to resist the approach of fire in the forests. It is as though you attempted to resist the approach of an avalanche of fire hurled against you. With the going down of the sun the wind abated and with it the fire. Timber was felled and water thrown over it; buildings were covered with wet blankets and all under the scorching heat and in blinding suffocating smoke that was enough to strangle one, and thus passed the night of Sunday.

Monday, the wind veered to the south, and cleared away the smoke. Strange to say not a building was burned—the town was saved. Monday the factory was closed to give the men rest, and today, September 27, all is quiet and going on as usual.

What did these repeated alarms filling the minds of the people with anxiety during the three or four weeks preceding the great calamity seem to indicate!

Doubtless they might have been looked on as the natural results of the great dryness, the number of fires lighted throughout the forests by hunters or others, as well as of the wind that fanned from time to time these fires, augmenting their strength and volume, but who will dare to say that they were not specially ordained by Him who is master of causes as well as of their effects? Does He not in most cases avail Himself of natural causes to execute His will and bring about the most wonderful results? It would indeed be difficult for anyone who had assisted as I had done at the terrible events following so closely on the above mentioned indications not to see in them the hand of God, and infer in consequence that these various signs were but forerunners of the great tragedy for which He wished us to be in some degree prepared.

I cannot say whether they were looked on by many in this light or not, but certainly some were greatly alarmed and prepared as far as lay in their power for a general conflagration, burying in the earth those objects which they specially wished to save. The Company caused all combustible materials on which a fire could possibly feed to be taken away, and augmented the number of water hogsheads girdling the town. Wise precautions certainly, which would have been of great service in any ordinary case of fire but which were utterly unavailing in the awful conflagration that burst upon us. They served nevertheless to demonstrate more clearly the *finger of God* in the events which succeeded.

As for myself, I allowed things to take their course without feeling any great anxiety as to consequences, or taking any precautionary steps, a frame of mind very different to that which I was destined to experience on the evening of the eighth of October.

A word now about my two parishes.

PESHTIGO

Peshtigo is situated on a river of that name, about six miles from Green Bay with which it communicates by means of a small railroad. The Company established at Peshtigo is a source of prosperity to the whole country, not only from its spirit of enterprise and large pecuniary resources but also from its numerous establishments, the most important of which, a factory of tubs and buckets, affords alone steady employment to more than three hundred workmen. The population of Peshtigo, including the farmers settled in the neighborhood, numbered then about two thousand souls. We were just finishing the construction of a church looked on as a great embellishment to the parish.

My abode was near the church, to the west of the river, and about a five or six minute walk from the latter. I mention this so as to render the circumstances of my escape through the midst of the flames more intelligible.

MARINETTE

Besides Peshtigo, I had the charge of another parish much more important situated on the River Menominee, at the point where it empties into Green Bay. It is called Marinette, from a female half breed, looked on as their queen by the Indians inhabiting that district. This woman received in baptism the name of Mary, *Marie*, which subsequently was corrupted into that of Marinette, or little Marie. Hence the name of Marinette bestowed on the place. It is there that we are at present building a church in honor of our Lady of Lourdes. At the time of the fire, Marinette possessed a church, a handsome new presbytery just finished, in which I was on the point of taking up my abode, besides a house in course of construction, destined to serve as a parish school.

The population was about double that of Peshtigo.

SINGULAR COINCIDENCE

Before entering into details, I will mention one more circumstance which may appear providential in the eyes of some, though brought about by purely natural causes.

At the time of the catastrophe our church at Peshtigo was ready for plastering, the ensuing Monday being appointed for commencing the work. The lime and marble dust were lying ready in front of the building, whilst the altar and various ornaments, as well as the pews, had all been removed. Being unable in consequence to officiate that Sunday in the sacred edifice, I told the people that there would be no mass, notifying at the same time the Catholics of *Cedar River* that I would spend the Sunday among them. The latter place was another of my missions, situated on Green Bay, four or five leagues north of Marinette. Saturday then, October 7, in accordance with my promise, I left Peshtigo and proceeded to the Menominee wharf to take passage on the steamboat *Dunlap*. There I vainly waited her coming several hours. It was the only time that year she had failed in the regularity of her trips. I learned after that the steamboat had passed as usual but stood out from shore, not deeming it prudent to approach nearer. The temperature was low, and the sky obscured by a dense mass of smoke which no breath of wind arose to dispel, a circumstance rendering navigation very dangerous especially in the neighborhood of the shore. Towards nightfall, when all hope of embarking was over, I returned to Peshtigo on horseback. After informing the people that mass would be said in my own abode the following morning, I prepared a temporary altar in one of the rooms, employing for the purpose the tabernacle itself which I had taken from the church, and after mass I replaced the Blessed Sacrament in it, intending to say mass again there the next Monday.

In the afternoon, when about leaving for Marinette where I was accustomed to chant vespers and preach when

high mass was said at Peshtigo, which was every fortnight, my departure was strongly opposed by several of my parishioners. There seemed to be a vague fear of some impending though unknown evil haunting the minds of many, nor was I myself entirely free from this unusual feeling. It was rather an impression than a conviction, for, on reflecting, I saw that things looked much as usual, and arrived at the conclusion that our fears were groundless, without, however, feeling much reassured thereby.

But for the certainty that the Catholics at Marinette, supposing me at Cedar River, would not, consequently, come to vespers, I would probably have persisted in going there, but under actual circumstances I deemed it best to yield to the representations made me and remain where I was.

God willed that I should be at the post of danger. The steamboat which I had expected to bear me from Peshtigo, on the seventh of October, had of course obeyed the elements which prevented her landing, but God is the master of these elements and Him they obey. Thus I found myself at Peshtigo Sunday evening, October 8, where, according to all previous calculations, projects, and arrangements, I should not have been.

The afternoon passed in complete inactivity. I remained still a prey to the indefinable apprehensions of impending calamity already alluded to, apprehensions contradicted by reason which assured me there was no more cause for present fear than there had been eight or fifteen days before—indeed less, on account of the precautions taken and the numerous sentinels watching over the public safety. These two opposite sentiments, one of which persistently asserted itself despite every effort to shake it off, whilst the other, inspired by reason was powerless to reassure me, plunged my faculties into a species of mental torpor.

In the outer world everything contributed to keep alive these two different impressions. On one side, the thick smoke

darkening the sky, the heavy, suffocating atmosphere, the mysterious silence filling the air, so often a presage of storm, seemed to afford grounds for fear in case of a sudden gale. On the other hand the passing and repassing in the street of countless young people bent only on amusement, laughing, singing, and perfectly indifferent to the menacing aspect of nature, was sufficient to make me think that I alone was a prey to anxiety, and to render me ashamed of manifesting the feeling.

During the afternoon, an old Canadian, remarkable for the deep interest he always took in everything relating to the church, came and asked permission to dig a well close to the sacred edifice so as to have water ready at hand in case of accident, as well as for the use of the plasterer who was coming to work the following morning. As my petitioner had no time to devote to the task during the course of the week, I assented. His labor completed, he informed me there was abundance of water, adding with an expression of deep satisfaction: "Father, not for a large sum of money would I give that well. Now if a fire breaks out again it will be easy to save our church." As he seemed greatly fatigued, I made him partake of supper and then sent him to rest. An hour after he was buried in deep slumber, but God was watching over him, and to reward him doubtless for the zeal he had displayed for the interests of his Father's House, enabled the pious old man to save his life; whilst in the very building in which he had been sleeping more than fifty people, fully awake, perished.

What we do for God is never lost, even in this world.

Towards seven in the evening, always haunted by the same misgivings, I left home to see how it went with my neighbors. I stepped over first to the house of an elderly kind-hearted widow, a Mrs. Dress, and we walked out together on her land. The wind was beginning to rise, blowing in short fitful gusts as if to try its strength and then as quickly

subsiding. My companion was as troubled as myself, and kept pressing her children to take some precautionary measures, but they refused, laughing lightly at her fears. At one time, whilst we were still in the fields, the wind rose suddenly with more strength than it had yet displayed and I perceived some old trunks of trees blaze out though without seeing about them any tokens of cinder or spark, just as if the wind had been a breath of fire, capable of kindling them into a flame by its mere contact. We extinguished these; the wind fell again, and nature resumed her moody and mysterious silence. I reëntered the house but only to leave it, feeling restless, though at the same time devoid of anything like energy, and retraced my steps to my own abode to conceal within it as I best could my vague but continually deepening anxieties. On looking towards the west, whence the wind had persistently blown for hours past, I perceived above the dense cloud of smoke overhanging the earth, a vivid red reflection of immense extent, and then suddenly struck on my ear, strangely audible in the preternatural silence reigning around, a distant roaring, yet muffled sound, announcing that the elements were in commotion somewhere. I rapidly resolved to return home and prepare, without further hesitation, for whatever events were impending. From listless and undecided as I had previously been, I suddenly became active and determined. This change of mind was a great relief. The vague fears that had heretofore pursued me vanished, and another idea, certainly not a result of anything like mental reasoning on my part, took possession of my mind; it was, not to lose much time in saving my effects but to direct my flight as speedily as possible in the direction of the river. Henceforth this became my ruling thought, and it was entirely unaccompanied by anything like fear or perplexity. My mind seemed all at once to become perfectly tranquil.

CHAPTER II DURING THE CATASTROPHE

It was now about half past eight in the evening. I first thought of my horse and turned him free into the street, deeming that, in any case, he would have more chance of escape thus than tied up in the stable. I then set about digging a trench six feet wide and six or seven feet deep, in the sandy soil of the garden, and though the earth was easy enough to work my task proved a tedious one. The atmosphere was heavy and oppressive, strangely affecting the strength and rendering respiration painful and laborious. The only consideration that could have induced me to keep on working when I found it almost impossible to move my limbs, was the fear, growing more strongly each moment into a certainty, that some great catastrophe was approaching. The crimson reflection in the western portion of the sky was rapidly increasing in size and in intensity; then between each stroke of my pickax I heard plainly, in the midst of the unnatural calm and silence reigning around, the strange and terrible noise already described, the muttered thunder of which became more distinct as it drew each moment nearer. This sound resembled the confused noise of a number of cars and locomotives approaching a railroad station, or the rumbling of thunder, with the difference that it never ceased, but deepened in intensity each moment more and more. The spectacle of this menacing crimson in the sky, the sound of this strange and unknown voice of nature constantly augmenting in terrible majesty, seemed to endow me with supernatural strength. Whilst toiling thus steadfastly at my task, the sound of human voices plainly audible amid the silence and species of stupor reigning around fell on my ear. They betrayed on the one hand thoughtlessness, on the other folly.

THOUGHTLESSNESS OF SOME

A neighboring American family were entertaining some friends at tea. The room which they occupied at the moment

overlooked my garden; thus they could see me whilst I could as easily overhear them. More than once, the smothered laughter of some of the guests, especially of the young girls, fell on my ear. Doubtless they were amusing themselves at my expense. About nine, the company dispersed, and Mrs. Tyler, the hostess, approached me. The actions of the priest always make a certain impression, even on Protestants.

"Father," she questioned, "do you think there is any danger?"

"I do not know," was my reply, "but I have unpleasant presentiments, and feel myself impelled to prepare for trouble."

"But if a fire breaks out, Father, what are we to do?"

"In that case, Madam, seek the river at once."

I gave her no reason for advising such a course, perhaps I had really none to offer, beyond that it was my innate conviction.

Shortly after, Mrs. Tyler and her family started in the direction of the river and were all saved. I learned later that out of the eight guests assembled at her house that evening, all perished with the exception of two.

THE FOLLY OF OTHERS

At a short distance from home, on the other side of the street, was a tavern. This place had been crowded all day with revellers, about two hundred young men having arrived that Sunday morning at Peshtigo by the boat to work on the railroad. Many were scattered throughout the town, where they had met acquaintances, while a large number were lodging at the tavern just mentioned. Perhaps they had passed the holy time of mass drinking and carousing there. Towards nightfall the greater part of them were too much intoxicated to take any share in the anxiety felt by the more steady members of the community, or even to notice the strange aspect of nature. Whilst working in my garden, I

saw several of them hanging about the veranda of the tavern or lounging in the yard. Their intoxicated condition was plainly revealed by the manner in which they quarrelled, wrestled, rolled on the ground, filling the air the while with wild shouts and horrid blasphemies.

When hastening through the street, on my way to the river at the moment the storm burst forth, the wind impelled me in the direction of this house. A death-like silence now reigned within it, as if reason had been restored to the inmates, or fear had suddenly penetrated to their hearts. Without shout or word they reëntered the place, closing the doors as if to bar death out—a few minutes later the house was swept away. What became of them I know not.

After finishing the digging of the trench I placed within it my trunks, books, church ornaments, and other valuables, covering the whole with sand to a depth of about a foot. Whilst still engaged at this, my servant, who had collected in a basket several precious objects in silver committed to my charge, such as crosses, medals, rosaries, etc., ran and deposited them on the steps of a neighboring store, scarcely conscious in her trouble of what she was doing.

She hastily returned for a cage containing her canary, which the wind, however, almost immediately tore from her grasp—and breathless with haste and terror she called to me to leave the garden and fly. The wind, forerunner of the tempest, was increasing in violence, the redness in the sky deepening, and the roaring sound like thunder seemed almost upon us. It was now time to think of the Blessed Sacrament—object of all objects, precious, priceless, especially in the eyes of a priest. It had never been a moment absent from my thoughts, for of course I had intended from the first to bring it with me. Hastening then to the chamber containing the tabernacle, I proceeded to open the latter, but the key, owing to my haste, slipped from my fingers and fell. There was no time for farther delay, so I caught up

the tabernacle with its contents and carried it out, placing it in my wagon as I knew it would be much easier to draw it thus than to bear it in my arms. My thought was that I should meet someone who would help me in the task. I reëntered to seek the chalice which had not been placed in the tabernacle, when a strange and startling phenomenon met my view. It was that of a cloud of sparks that blazed up here and there with a sharp detonating sound like that of powder exploding, and flew from room to room. I understood then that the air was saturated with some special gas, and I could not help thinking if this gas lighted up from mere contact with a breath of hot wind, what would it be when fire would come in actual contact with it. The circumstance, though menacing enough, inspired me with no fear, my safety seemed already assured. Outside the door, in a cage attached to the wall, was a jay that I had had in my possession for a long time. The instinct of birds in foreseeing a storm is well known, and my poor jay was fluttering wildly round his cage, beating against its bars as if seeking to escape, and uttering shrill notes of alarm. I grieved for its fate but could do nothing for it. The lamps were burning on the table, and I thought, as I turned away, how soon their gleam would be eclipsed in the vivid light of a terrible conflagration.

I look on the peculiar, indeed almost childish frame of mind in which I then found myself, as most providential. It kept up my courage in the ordeal through which I was about to pass, veiling from me in great part its horror and danger. Any other mental condition, though perhaps more in keeping with my actual position would have paralyzed my strength and sealed my fate.

I vainly called my dog who, disobeying the summons, concealed himself under my bed, only to meet death there later. Then I hastened out to open the gate so as to bring forth my wagon. Barely had I laid hand on it, when the

wind heretofore violent rose suddenly to a hurricane, and quick as lightning opened the way for my egress from the yard by sweeping planks, gate, and fencing away into space. "The road is open," I thought, "we have only to start."

THE GENERAL FLIGHT

I had delayed my departure too long. It would be impossible to describe the trouble I had to keep my feet, to breathe, to retain hold of the buggy which the wind strove to tear from my grasp, or to keep the tabernacle in its place. To reach the river, even unencumbered by any charge, was more than many succeeded in doing; several failed, perishing in the attempt. How I arrived at it is even to this day a mystery to myself.

The air was no longer fit to breathe, full as it was of sand, dust, ashes, cinders, sparks, smoke, and fire. It was almost impossible to keep one's eyes unclosed, to distinguish the road, or to recognize people, though the way was crowded with pedestrians, as well as vehicles crossing and crashing against each other in the general flight. Some were hastening towards the river, others from it, whilst all were struggling alike in the grasp of the hurricane. A thousand discordant deafening noises rose on the air together. The neighing of horses, falling of chimneys, crashing of uprooted trees, roaring and whistling of the wind, crackling of fire as it ran with lightning-like rapidity from house to house—all sounds were there save that of the human voice. People seemed stricken dumb by terror. They jostled each other without exchanging look, word, or counsel. The silence of the tomb reigned among the living; nature alone lifted up its voice and spoke. Though meeting crowded vehicles taking a direction quite opposite to that which I myself was following, it never even entered my mind that it would perhaps be better for me to follow them. Probably it was the same thing with them. We all hurried blindly on to our fate.

Almost with the first steps taken in the street the wind overturned and dragged me with the wagon close to the tavern already mentioned. Farther on, I was again thrown down over some motionless object lying on the earth; it proved to be a woman and a little girl, both dead. I raised a head that fell back heavily as lead. With a long breath I rose to my feet, but only to be hurled down again. Farther on I met my horse whom I had set free in the street. Whether he recognized me—whether he was in that spot by chance, I cannot say, but whilst struggling anew to my feet, I felt his head leaning on my shoulder. He was trembling in every limb. I called him by name and motioned him to follow me, but he did not move. He was found partly consumed by fire in the same place.

Arrived near the river, we saw that the houses adjacent to it were on fire, whilst the wind blew the flames and cinders directly into the water. The place was no longer safe. I resolved then to cross to the other side though the bridge was already on fire. The latter presented a scene of indescribable and awful confusion, each one thinking he could attain safety on the other side of the river. Those who lived in the east were hurrying towards the west, and those who dwelt in that west were wildly pushing on to the east so that the bridge was thoroughly encumbered with cattle, vehicles, women, children, and men, all pushing and crushing against each other so as to find an issue from it. Arrived amid the crowd on the other side, I resolved to descend the river, to a certain distance below the dam, where I knew the shore was lower and the water shallower, but this I found impossible. The sawmill on the same side, at the angle of the bridge, as well as the large store belonging to the Company standing opposite across the road, were both on fire. The flames from these two edifices met across the road, and none could traverse this fiery passage without meeting with instant death. I was thus obliged to ascend the river on the left bank, above the

dam, where the water gradually attained a great depth. After placing a certain distance between myself and the bridge, the fall of which I momentarily expected, I pushed my wagon containing the tabernacle as far into the water as possible. It was all that I could do. Henceforth I had to look to the saving of my life. The whirlwind in its continual ascension had, so to speak, worked up the smoke, dust, and cinders, so that, at least, we could see clear before us. The banks of the river as far as the eye could reach were covered with people standing there, motionless as statues, some with eyes staring, upturned towards heaven, and tongues protruded. The greater number seemed to have no idea of taking any steps to procure their safety, imagining, as many afterwards acknowledged to me, that the end of the world had arrived and that there was nothing for them but silent submission to their fate. Without uttering a word—the efforts I had made in dragging my wagon with me in my flight had left me perfectly breathless, besides the violence of the storm entirely prevented anything like speech—I pushed the persons standing on each side of me into the water. One of these sprang back again with a half smothered cry, murmuring: “I am wet”; but immersion in water was better than immersion in fire. I caught him again and dragged him out with me into the river as far as possible. At the same moment I heard a splash of the water along the river’s brink. All had followed my example. It was time; the air was no longer fit for inhalation, whilst the intensity of the heat was increasing. A few minutes more and no living thing could have resisted its fiery breath.

IN THE WATER

It was about ten o’clock when we entered into the river. When doing so I neither knew the length of time we would be obliged to remain there, nor what would ultimately happen to us, yet, wonderful to relate, my fate had never caused

me a moment of anxiety from the time that, yielding to the involuntary impulse warning me to prepare for danger, I had resolved on directing my flight towards the river. Since then I had remained in the same careless frame of mind, which permitted me to struggle against the most insuperable obstacles, to brave the most appalling dangers, without ever seeming to remember that my life might pay the forfeit. Once in water up to our necks, I thought we would, at least be safe from fire, but it was not so; the flames darted over the river as they did over land, the air was full of them, or rather the air itself was on fire. Our heads were in continual danger. It was only by throwing water constantly over them and our faces, and beating the river with our hands, that we kept the flames at bay. Clothing and quilts had been thrown into the river, to save them, doubtless, and they were floating all around. I caught at some that came within reach and covered with them the heads of the persons who were leaning against or clinging to me. These wraps dried quickly in the furnace-like heat and caught fire whenever we ceased sprinkling them. The terrible whirlwind that had burst over us at the moment I was leaving home had, with its continually revolving circle of opposing winds, cleared the atmosphere. The river was as bright, brighter than by day, and the spectacle presented by these heads rising above the level of the water, some covered, some uncovered, the countless hands employed in beating the waves, was singular and painful in the extreme. So free was I from the fear and anxiety that might naturally have been expected to reign in my mind at such a moment, that I actually perceived only the ludicrous side of the scene at times and smiled within myself at it. When turning my gaze from the river I chanced to look either to the right or left, before me or upwards, I saw nothing but flames; houses, trees, and the air itself were on fire. Above my head, as far as the eye could reach into space, alas! too brilliantly lighted, I saw nothing but immense volumes of

flames covering the firmament, rolling one over the other with stormy violence as we see masses of clouds driven wildly hither and thither by the fierce power of the tempest.

Near me, on the bank of the river, rose the store belonging to the factory, a large three-story building, filled with tubs, buckets, and other articles. Sometimes the thought crossed my mind that if the wind happened to change, we should be buried beneath the blazing ruins of this place, but still the supposition did not cause me much apprehension. When I was entering the water, this establishment was just taking fire; the work of destruction was speedy, for, in less than a quarter of an hour, the large beams were lying blazing on the ground, while the rest of the building was either burned or swept off into space.

INCIDENTS OF THE FIRE

Not far from me a woman was supporting herself in the water by means of a log. After a time a cow swam past. There were more than a dozen of these animals in the river, impelled thither by instinct, and they succeeded in saving their lives. The first mentioned one overturned in its passage the log to which the woman was clinging and she disappeared into the water. I thought her lost; but soon saw her emerge from it holding on with one hand to the horns of the cow, and throwing water on her head with the other. How long she remained in this critical position I know not, but I was told later that the animal had swam to the shore, bearing her human burden safely with her; and what threatened to bring destruction to the woman had proved the means of her salvation.

At the moment I was entering the river, another woman, terrified and breathless, reached its bank. She was leading one child by the hand, and held pressed to her breast what appeared to be another, enveloped in a roll of disordered linen, evidently caught up in haste. O horror! on opening these wraps to look on the face of her child it was not there. It

must have slipped from her grasp in her hurried flight. No words could portray the look of stupor, of desolation that flitted across the poor mother's face. The half smothered cry: "Ah! my child!" escaped her, then she wildly strove to force her way through the crowd so as to cast herself into the river. The force of the wind was less violent on water than on land, and permitted the voice to be heard. I then endeavored to calm the anguish of the poor bereaved woman by suggesting that her child had been found by others and saved, but she did not even look in my direction, but stood there motionless, her eyes wild and staring, fixed on the opposite shore. I soon lost sight of her, and was informed subsequently that she had succeeded in throwing herself into the river where she met death.

Things went well enough with me during the first three or four hours of this prolonged bath, owing in part, I suppose, to my being continually in motion, either throwing water on my own head or on that of my neighbors.

It was not so, however, with some of those who were standing near me, for their teeth were chattering and their limbs convulsively trembling. Reaction was setting in and the cold penetrating through their frames. Dreading that so long a sojourn in the water might be followed by severe cramps, perhaps death, I endeavored to ascend the bank a short distance, so as to ascertain the temperature, but my shoulders were scarcely out of the river, when a voice called to me: "Father, beware, you are on fire!"

The hour of deliverance from this prison of fire and water had not yet arrived—the struggle was not yet over. A lady who had remained beside me since we had first taken to the river, and who, like all the others, had remained silent till then, now asked me:

"Father, do you not think that this is the end of the world?"

“I do not think so,” was my reply, “but if other countries are burned as ours seems to have been, the end of the world, at least for us, must be at hand.”

After this both relapsed into silence.

There is an end to all things here below, even misfortune. The longed-for moment of our return to land was at length arriving, and already sprinkling of our heads was becoming unnecessary. I drew near the bank, seated myself on a log, being in this manner only partly immersed in the water. Here I was seized with a violent chill. A young man perceiving it threw a blanket over me which at once afforded me relief, and soon after I was able to leave this compulsory bath in which I had been plunged for about five hours and a half.

(To be continued)